

Host Nation COVID-19 News Stories for April 20

Distance restrictions will still apply for months

The Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, expects that distance regulations of 1.5 meters and stricter hygiene rules will have to be maintained for a long time to come. The CDU politician told ZDF's "heute-journal" that this will continue to be the case "for months". He affirms that the federal government will significantly upgrade the public health service in terms of personnel and technology. It must be possible to keep the number of new infections below the current level of 3,000 to 4,000 daily. (News channel Ard April 20, 2020)

Head of the Chancellery Helge Braun- New freedom should be used disciplined and prudently

The head of the Chancellery, Helge Braun, has appealed to the people of Germany to use the easing of the severe restrictions in the fight against the Corona crisis in a disciplined and prudent manner. "Now we must transfer the discipline we have shown in staying at home to other areas," Braun told the German Press Agency. If infection rates start to rise excessively again, "more restrictions will be necessary again, to avoid creating a vicious circle". (News channel Ntv April 20, 2020)

Easing the restrictions could mean more infections

The easing of the anti-corona measures will, according to Saxony's CDU-Prime Minister Michael Kretschmer lead to more people becoming infected with the virus. The relaxation went "to the limit of what is justifiable", he said on Sunday evening on the ARD television program "Anne Will". "We will definitely see an increase in infections." In three weeks, we'll see if the easing of restrictions were too extensive. The state of Saxony is going further than other states in its loosening measures, and is stretching the agreement between CDU chancellor Angela Merkel and the state premiers very far. As in other states, today already, not only will a number of other shops be opened there, but also church services will be permitted under strict rules, and the first graduating classes will already be brought back into schools. However, this is connected with tightening regulations elsewhere: Saxony is the first federal state to introduce an obligation to wear mouth and nose protection when shopping and in local traffic this Monday. Nationwide, there is only a recommendation to wear such everyday masks. (News channel Ntv April 20, 2020)

What is changing today - and what is not (good to know for the community)

The federal and state governments have agreed that all shops with an area of up to 800 square metres may reopen. As an orientation, it was agreed that shops with more than 800 square meters are considered special structures according to building law.

Starting today, car and bicycle dealers and bookstores will also be allowed to receive customers again, regardless of their size. In some regions of Germany, zoos are also reopening.

What restrictions are to be expected when shopping?

There are conditions for the reopening of shops: As already in the food trade, protective masks, distance markings and entrance controls will in future shape the image of the shops when buying fashion or books. What restrictions are to be expected when shopping?

Private security services could check at the entrances of the shops how many people are in the shop at the same time. This is because the contact restrictions, which recommend a distance of at least 1.50 meters, still apply.

Where must or should one wear a protective mask?

An "urgent recommendation", but not an order. This is how the Federal Government's position on the subject of protective masks can be summarized. This is not enough for some federal states: In Saxony, starting Monday, it will be mandatory to wear masks in buses, trains and shops. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania will make mouth and nose protection mandatory in public transport and taxis from 27 April. Both states point out that this is not about medical masks, but simple face coverings. In addition, there are individual cities and municipalities that are taking this route: for example Wolfsburg, Jena or Sulz am Neckar. The improvised so-called "community masks" offer their wearers only limited protection, but above all reduce the risk of infection for others. If they are worn by all people in public, the risk of virus transmission is reduced overall. Masks are currently available mainly in pharmacies and online shops, and there are also numerous offers and instructions for making your own masks.

Which restrictions remain?

Despite initial easing, many restrictions remain - especially the distance restrictions. Even major events will remain prohibited until 31 August. The federal government fears crowds that are difficult to control. Bars and restaurants must remain closed for the time being - out-of-home sales will continue to be permitted.

Cultural facilities, swimming pools, playgrounds, fitness centers, beauty parlors, massage parlors, tattoo studios and similar establishments will remain closed. Hairdressers are allowed to open again from 4 May.

Travel - including to relatives - should continue to be avoided. Tourist overnight accommodation is not permitted. The worldwide travel warning still applies to trips abroad.

In the coming days, representatives of religious communities and churches want to work out a concept together with the federal and state governments to gradually make church services in Germany possible again, provided that the hygiene rules for protection against corona are observed. Saxony wants to allow public worship services with a maximum of 15 participants under certain conditions as early as this Monday. Thuringia could follow soon. (News channel ArD April 20, 2020)

The President of the Czech Republic wants to close borders for a year

The Czech President Milos Zeman recommends that his citizens discover the beauty of their own country this summer due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The head of state said in a radio interview on Sunday that state borders should remain closed for a full year to prevent "a new wave of infection being caused by people travelling to countries where the pandemic is not yet over. (News channel Zdf April 19, 2020)

Nearly 13,000 intensive care beds available in Germany

According to current figures from the German Interdisciplinary Association for Intensive and Emergency Medicine (DIVI), almost 13,000 intensive care beds are vacant in Germany. The association announced on Sunday that the clinics had a total of at least 30,000 beds.

A reliable overview of all intensive care capacities in Germany has finally been achieved, said DIVI President Uwe Janssens. This knowledge gives doctors and politicians a little breathing space - not to be confused with false euphoria. " We are still not out of the woods !" (News channel Zdf April 20, 2020)

Söder announces mandatory masks in Bavaria

After Saxony, the federal state of Bavaria is also introducing mandatory masks. Prime Minister Markus Söder announced in the state parliament that starting next week it will be mandatory to wear a face mask or scarf in all stores and on public transport. He also stated that he will meet with Baden Württembergs prime minister Kretschmann this week. (News channel Ntv April 20, 2020)

Lord Mayor Palmer -Tübingen also plans to make masks mandatory

The state of Baden-Württemberg has not yet introduced mandatory masks, but Tübingen might soon be required to wear them: According to the Lord Mayor Boris Palmer, the city is planning a corresponding step, as he told the German Press Agency. According to this, such a regulation could come into force next week if the city council agrees. The obligation to wear masks would then apply in stores and on public transport, but not in outside areas of public space. (Newspaper Stuttgart Zeitung April 20, 2020)

Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) criticises severely the discussions on further easing of restrictions in the fight against the coronavirus.

Apparently, the current switching conference of the CDU presidium appears to be in high gear. According to the German Press Agency, Chancellor Angela Merkel has criticized the discussions about further easing of restrictions in the fight against the coronavirus in an extraordinarily harsh manner, citing groups of participants. According to the agency, Merkel made it clear that she was dissatisfied with the fact that the message of cautious loosening of restrictions had led to "opening discussion orgies" in some countries. The discussion about loosening the restrictions is not helpful. She was very concerned that the positive trend in corona infections would reverse again because not enough people would stick to the contact restrictions, Merkel said. (News channel Welt April 20, 2020)

Teacher President warns schools will not run as usual for a year because of Corona

Teacher President Heinz-Peter Meidinger has rejected hopes for normal school operations in the foreseeable future. In an interview with the newspaper, Meidinger said that one must " be prepared for considerable restrictions at schools for at least one more year".

For example, the number of lessons would have to be reduced by half if additional classes returned to the schools. One should also think about shortening the curriculum, since normal lessons cannot be held for a longer period of time anyway and therefore school material would be lost, Meidinger continued. "You also have to look at which curriculum goals are not necessary," he told the newspaper. "I am one of those who always says: No curriculum objective is indispensable. But now we must seriously consider what still needs to be taken through, and what can be reduced, even in the next school year". In the end, the availability of a vaccine will be decisive for normal teaching, Meidinger continued. (News channel Focus April 20, 2020)

Doctors demand that sick notes can be handled over a phone call

There is still massive criticism from doctors' associations regarding the expiration of the special regulation for sick leave released via phone. The decision has caused pure shock among doctors. The German General Practitioners' Association Ulrich Weigeldt says: "It cannot be that on one hand a large ban on contact is being maintained and on the other hand patients with infections are now visiting their doctors' practices again." The end of "sick leave by phone" is premature, said Klaus Reinhardt, president of the German Medical Association. "It is a health risk for the medical teams and also for the patients." Sick leave by phone call is no longer possible as of today - the Joint Federal Committee of Physicians, Clinics, and Health Insurance Companies had not extended the measure on Friday - after all, the doctors have an alliance with Chancellor Merkel. She also wants to reintroduce sick leave via phone call. (News channel Ntv April 20, 2020)